

DEVIL'S RIVER NEWS.

VOL 11.

SONORA, SUTTON CO., TEXAS, SATURDAY, JULY 20, 1901.

NO. 342

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Devil's River News

PUBLISHED WEEKLY.

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Sonora, Texas, - July 20, 1901.

Cattle Ranges of the Southwest.

By H. L. Bentley, Special Agent in charge of Grass Station at Abilene, Texas.

(Continued from last week)

PROMISING GRASSES AND FORAGE PLANTS NATIVE IN THE SOUTHWEST.

There are 350 kinds of grasses in the State of Texas. Some of these are woodland and pine-land species from the eastern agricultural portion of the State. It is safe to say that the grazing part of the State possesses more kinds of nutritious grasses than any similar region in any country.

Of these a dozen require some brief characterization. They are the best of the grasses and forage plants, the ones which may profitably be brought into cultivation, and are the ones on which the ranchers will depend when they begin to collect seeds of the native grasses to cover the bare places in their pastures.

Bermuda grass (*Cynodon dactylon*)—This native of the tropical and subtropical regions of the world was introduced into southern Texas sixty or more years ago, having been first planted near the mouth of the Brazos River. It has been distributed along the streams, and now covers many square miles of the best grazing lands of southern Texas. Its value is too well known to require further mention. However, Bermuda grass can not be compared in its drought resistant qualities with curly mesquite or buffalo grass, which it resembles in habit. It is better adapted to moist river banks, the borders of tanks, and low ground generally. Where the land can be irrigated, it is doubtful whether there is any grass which will furnish more or better grazing, but it is reported by a number of stockmen who have tried to seed down pastures to it that the curly mesquite will run it out in dry years. It does not produce seed in great abundance, and so must be propagated by division of the roots.

Black grama (*Hilaria mutica*)—This is one of the most important grasses of the "staked plains" and of the country to the westward. It apparently does not extend eastward in Texas lower than 2,000 feet altitude. In former times this grass was abundant near Colorado City and Big Springs, Tex., and was cut for hay, which was highly valued by feeders to whom it was shipped in other sections of Texas; but the grass is gradually being run out, because of overstocking and over pasturing. It is valuable especially as a winter forage, because the stems remain green long after the leaves have become entirely brown and dead. In this characteristic it resembles black grama (*Bouteloua eriopoda*) of New Mexico. It seeds abundantly whenever there is rain in the early part of the year. It is one of the most important grasses to use in the renovation of worn-out native pastures.

Buffalo grass (*Bulbilia dactyloides*)—This is a perennial grass, that never grows high enough to cut, but which forms a beautiful, closely interwoven turf, with lateral, creeping root stocks bearing an abundance of leaves. It is one of the most nutritious of the prairie grasses, being equal in feeding value to the grammas, though not producing so large a quantity of forage. Buffalo grass and the curly mesquite are the most common of the Southwestern grasses. They spread rapidly either from seed or from turf divided and scattered in furrows. In a wet season this growth is extremely rapid. Buffalo grass will survive almost any degree of drying, trampling, and ill usage, making it one of the finest and most desirable kinds. Owing to the manner in which the seed is produced it is practically impossible to harvest it, but because of the creeping habit of the grass it is one of the easiest to establish on the range, being propagated in the same way as Bermuda grass or curly mesquite.

Colorado grass (*Panicum texanum*)—This rank-growing annual is undoubtedly a native of some of the western river valleys of Texas, either of the Colorado or some of its tributaries. It was first extensively brought to the notice of ranchers and farmers near Austin, Tex., in the bottom lands along the river where it appeared after a flood. Because of this, it has taken the name Colorado grass, Austin grass, or Concho grass. But whatever may be its origin, it is a very excellent species, and one of the best hay grasses on the black, waxy, prairie soils. When a field is seeded with it, it commences to spring up about the time the corn is cultivated for the first time, makes a rapid growth that quickly covers the ground. About the time the corn is ready to be gathered Colorado grass may be cut for hay. The farmers in the region where it grows are beginning to lay by their corn with special reference to this grass. It is regarded by the farmers of central Texas as the best of all their hay grasses. It requires cultivated ground for its full development, and grows better on low,

rich bottom lands and river valleys than on the uplands. Furthermore, it has not the weedy character of some other hay grasses, being easily destroyed in a single season if this is desired. Yields of 2 tons of hay per acre are not unusual, in addition to the crop of corn taken from the same field earlier in the season. It is an excellent substitute for Johnson grass, and deserves to be cultivated on a much larger scale.

Curley mesquite (*Hilaria cenchroides*)—This is a turf forming grass, which has the peculiar habit of creeping over the ground and rooting at the joints of the stems, from which spring leafy branches that in their turn reach out in every direction to take root. It commences to grow earlier in the spring than buffalo grass, makes a thick mat of rich feed during summer, matures on its roots, and in the fall and winter, when not rotted by late rains, affords excellent pasture for all classes of stock. It stands drought equally well with the grammas and classes of stock. It stands drought equally well with the grammas and buffalo grass, and is perhaps better adapted to the intense summer heat of Texas and New Mexico than the latter. Buffalo hunters in the early days called it "southern buffalo grass," but it is now known as "curly mesquite." In very dry weather the leaves and stems dry up and look as though they were dead, but in a day after a warm rain it turns green to the end of its smallest blade. When cured on its roots stock fatten on it without grain. It may be compared with Bermuda grass appearance and manner of growth, but is far superior as a drought-resistant grass for general purposes. Pastures may be seeded down to it by harrowing in bits of chopped up turf in the early spring or by heeling in bits of turf after rain when the ground is soft. It rapidly spreads from these initial points, and in the course of a year will form a fine turf over the entire field. It is therefore one of the best grasses to be used in the renovation of the ranges.

Ground plum (*Astragalus crasiscarpus*)—This is a perennial legume, which grows throughout the entire region. It is well known on account of its fleshy plums or pods, which are produced in the greatest abundance during the early spring months. The plant is eaten by cattle and sheep, and the fleshy pods are greedily sought for and devoured by hogs, which run at large in many of the counties of Texas and New Mexico. In fact, where hogs run free on the ranges this plant is being rapidly exterminated through its inability to ripen seed. It is very highly spoken of by stockmen, coming at a later period than the tallow weed, but before there is much grass. The forage is rich and is relished by all kinds of stock. There are several closely related species, which are all equally useful, and an effort should be made to prevent their complete extermination, at least until something equally good is found to their places.

Needle grass (*Aristida fasciculata*)—This grass has been looked upon quite generally by botanists and people other than cattlemen as very much of a nuisance, if not entirely worthless, but a careful inquiry conducted among the cattlemen shows that it is really one of the most valuable of the native range grasses. It is true that this grass is in some respects objectionable; the needler or ripe seeds and their long three-parted beards are sharp and brittle and cause much inconvenience when eaten by cattle, piercing their tongues and mouths and causing them to become sore. In the case of sheep the needles become fastened in the wool and often penetrate the skin. This leads to much annoyance, and often causes loss, especially of lambs. However, the grass is not eaten by cattle when the seeds are ripe if there is enough other food. Needle grass is valuable, because it is almost the first to start growth in the spring, coming long before the curly mesquite or grama grasses have commenced to grow. (Be continued next week)

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